The times of
DANTE

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E quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle.

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Introduction

Dante Alighieri, a Florentine, is considered the founder of the Italian language and a pillar of Western literature.

Dante personally participated in the events of his time, which he read with the admirable mastery of the "Comedy."

I believe that when reading his works, it is important not to lose sight of the era and the events that affected him.

Professor C.U. Posocco's text, "La vita di Dante in relazione alla storia del suo tempo," Como, 1881, fulfills this task.

In presenting an abridged version of Professor Posocco's text, I apologize for the inevitable errors.

(The notes are taken from Wikipedia, translated with Google)

C. U. POSOCCO

LA VITA DI DANTE

IN RELAZIONE ALLA STORIA DEL SUO TEMPO

SECONDA EDIZIONE
CON GIUNTE DI COSE INEDITE
E CORREZIONI

« Molte gran' cose in picciol fascio stringo. »
PETRARCA, *Tr. IV, C. II,* 133.

COMO,
COI TIPI DI CARLO FRANCHI.
—
1881.

DANTE AND HIS TIMES

Dante's family

The Aldighieri family descended from a branch of the Elisei Cacciaguida (b. 1106 d. in Soria 1148) had married an Aldighiera degli Aldighieri from Ferrara, with whom he had many children.

He gave his firstborn the name Aldighiero; and from this, his descendants were called Aldighieri, changed to Alighieri to soften the pronunciation.

Dante was born in Florence in 1265, around mid-May, the year of Clement IV's election as pope. He was baptized in San Giovanni.

About his birth Dante himself cites:

…I saw the sign,
Which follows Taurus (Gemini)

In Dante's time, astrology was very popular; and the constellation of Gemini was believed to predispose one to literature

and science. From this it is understandable how Brunetto Latini [1](1220-1294) speaks to Dante:

If you follow your star,
You cannot fail in glorious port,
If I realized well in the beautiful life.
And if I had not died so long ago,
Seeing the sky so benign towards you,
I would have given you comfort at work.

If Brunetto Latini drew, at Dante's birth, the horoscope of the greatness to which he would rise; if Boccaccio (1313-1375), who wrote his life and commented on the first 17 cantos of the Inferno, tells of a dream Dante's mother had shortly before giving birth, in which she seemed to see *"a son, who, in a very short time, feeding only on the berries [2]that fell from the laurel and the waves of a clear spring, became a shepherd, and did his best to get some of the leaves of the tree whose fruit had nourished him; and as she tried to do so, she seemed to see him fall, and when he*

[1] Brunetto Latini, also known as Brunetto Latino (Florence, c. 1220–1294), was an Italian writer, poet, politician, and notary, author of works in the Italian and French vernacular. He is known for his ethical and moral poetry, and as the author of Tesoretto and Livres dou Tresor. His student Dante placed him in the seventh circle of Hell (Canto XV) in his Divine Comedy because of his homosexuality, where, however, he is described with grateful words as " *the man who becomes eternal* " through his poetic virtues.

[2] Laurel berry.

rose again, she saw him become no longer a man, but a peacock" ; Dante himself shows that he is not at all free from the superstitious beliefs of his century; since, in Paradiso (XXII), he says:

O glorious stars, O light pregnant with great virtue, from which I recognize all, whatever it may be, my genius;
With you was born and hid He who is the father of all mortal light,
When I first felt the Tuscan air.

Childhood

Very little is known about Dante's childhood; Boccaccio [3]states that, up until then, *"the signs of the future glory of his genius appeared"* , and that *"from the beginning of his childhood he had learned the first elements of letters, not by giving himself over, according to the customs of the nobles, to childish laziness and idleness, growing lazy in his mother's lap, but by devoting his childhood, in his own country, to continuous study of the liberal arts, in which he became wonderfully expert".*

[3] Giovanni Boccaccio (Certaldo or Florence, 1313 – Certaldo, 1375) was an Italian writer and poet. Also known as "il Certaldese," he was one of the most important figures in the European literary scene of the 14th century. He was the greatest European prose writer of his time, a versatile writer who blended different literary trends and genres into original works, thanks to a creative pursuit marked by experimentalism.

Death of the father

In the last months of 1274, his father died; and it is remarkable that he (Dante) left no mention of him in his works. His mother and relatives took special care of him, and educated him in the noblest disciplines of the time. But Dante's first love was poetry.

May 1st in Florence

It was the year 1274: it was the first day of May, when Laura

moves and smells
All covered in grass and flowers

Just as in Greece, choirs of boys and virgins sang paeans [4]at the opening of the flower season, originating in the praises of Diana and Apollo, so Florence celebrated the coming spring, as is also customary on Ascension Day. The merry bands spread across the surrounding green hills, and, amid music and dance, spread their songs into the air.

[4] Religious lyrical song dedicated to Apollo.

Folco Portinari[5]

A wealthy and distinguished citizen, the founder of the Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova also wanted to celebrate the return of the happy and mild season, and invited relatives and friends to his home. Among the latter was Dante's father. Alighiero accepted the invitation, bringing his son, who was about nine years old. On this occasion, Dante saw Beatrice for the first time, wearing a red dress, and felt himself caressed by Love.

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[5] Folco Portinari (Portico di Romagna, 1222 – Florence, 1289) was an Italian banker, perhaps originally from Portico di Romagna, in the Forlì Apennines, where the Portinari family palace can still be seen today. Folco was prior of Florence in 1282 and had six daughters, the most famous of whom was Beatrice (Bice), whom many critics identify as the young woman who inspired Dante. Folco Portinari was a Guelph from a merchant family and held important leadership positions within the Guilds and in the political life of 13th-century Florence, as prior of the Porta San Piero district. At the time, all types of financial gain were seen as the fruit of usury and therefore as evidence of a sin that led the guilty person's soul to damnation; For this reason, it was not uncommon for these great bankers to donate a portion of their earnings, before their deaths, to artistic and devotional commissions, charitable works, and investments for their city. Even Folco, in 1285, according to tradition, persuaded by Monna Tessa, the family governess, and encouraged by Bishop Andrea dei Mozzi, decided to donate a significant portion of his fortune to the foundation of the Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova, still the main hospital in the center of Florence.

Beatrice

Beatrice, daughter of Folco (died December 31, 1289) and Cilia di Gherardo de' Caponsacchi, was born in April 1266, a year after Dante. She was full of sweet, lovable, and natural beauty. This is why Dante says in the Vita Nuova: *"Almost at the beginning of her ninth year she appeared to me, and I saw her at the end of my ninth year."*

As soon as it struck me in the sight
The high virtue, which had already pierced me
Before I was out of childhood.

Dante's Love

Dante's love, warm, reserved, thoughtful, grew, one might say, in mystery. And all his thoughts were of love.

At eighteen, he saw Beatrice again between two gentle women; and he went away happy because she responded courteously to his greeting.

Except for the fear that people would become aware of his infatuation, because:

The face shows the color of the heart ,

he "shielded the truth" by pretending to love other women.

Beatrice, wife of Simone dei Bardi

In January 1287, Beatrice married Simone di Jacopo de' Bardi [6], a Guelph member of one of Florence's leading families. She was 21 years old. And if Dante, so deeply in love with her, was unable to marry her, it proves that for him there were insurmountable obstacles; the greatest of which was the disparity of their fortunes.

Even after she became his wife, Dante never stopped loving her. It wasn't love for woman's sake that he felt; it was love that rose from the creature to the Creator, a "ladder" to the Supreme Good. For his ascetic faith, love transcended the confines of the earth. Deep down, in his soul, Dante was a mystic.

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[6] The Bardi family was a noble Florentine family, among the most important in the city's history in the Late Middle Ages. They built their fortune on banking and mercantile activities, heading a very wealthy trading company that, along with that of the Peruzzi, was for a time the linchpin of medieval Europe's economy. Its collapse in the 1340s led to a terrible crisis in the Florentine credit system. Simone de' Bardi, known as Mone, married Beatrice Portinari, who was still in her teens.

Death of Beatrice

In the year 1290, on June 9, Beatrice died, aged 24 years and 2 months.

The Poet's Pain

Beatrice's death was so bitterly and deeply felt by the Poet that, for some time, he was unable to find comfort. The greatest have tears, not words. True grief disdains vulgar consolations: it either bursts into a cry, or vents itself in weeping, or remains silent. Boccaccio says: *"The days were alike to the nights, and the nights to the days; none of which passed without wails, without sighs, and without copious quantities of tears, and his eyes seemed like two abundant fountains of gushing water, so much so that they wondered where he had so much moisture that it sufficed for his weeping."*

And so says the Poet in one of his songs of the New Life,

The eyes, aching for pity of the heart,
They have suffered the pain of crying,
Yes, they have now remained defeated.
Crying in pain and sighing in anguish breaks my heart wherever I find myself alone,
Yes, anyone who saw it would be sorry.

But the tears pass. The Poet, a strong and energetic nature, after such an outburst, withdraws as if into himself and considers the full horror of his condition. A terrible truth is in his mind: Beatrice is no more; and, therefore, she will never be able to find peace; and so he feels a strong desire to die too.

How many times alas!, it reminds me
That I must never
To see the lady, for whom I go so sorrowfully,
So much pain seems to gather around my heart
The painful mind,
I say: Soul, why are you not going?
What torments you will bear
In the century, which is already so boring to you,
They make me pensive with strong fear. Where I call upon Death,
How sweet and gentle my rest;
And I say: come to me, with so much love,
For I am hateful towards anyone who dies.

But a kind woman shows him pity, and he feels deep gratitude; and, little by little, from gratitude he passes to love.

The New Life

In 1292, at the age of 27, Dante began writing the Vita Nuova, which was so titled because it deals with the regeneration brought about in him by Love.

He completed it in 1294. It was thought that he showed it to Brunetto Latini, which could be true: but certainly not accompanied by this sonnet, which is apocryphal.

Sir Brunetto, this little joke
With it you come to celebrate Easter;
You don't mean Easter to eat,
She doesn't eat, rather she wants to be read to.
His sentence requires no haste,
Neither a place of noise nor a jester's:
Indeed, he wants to flatter himself several times,
Before it enters into someone else's mind.
If you don't understand it that way,
Among your people there are many Alberti Friars,
To understand what I bring to them in my hand.
Hug me without laughter;
And if the others are not certain of the doubts,
Finally, turn to Messer Giano.

Before Dante, women were for poets an abstract type, an ideal of ascetic perfection, a pure and simple, metaphysical concept,

common to all. For this reason, they were praised and sung with a kind of formula, from which it was never permitted to deviate.

Love was supposed to generate thoughts of virtue and counteract vice, as Dante says. It wasn't this or that real, living woman they found worthy of their verses: it was woman, without a name of her own.

Individualism was disappearing; generality was taking over. The poetry of the Troubadours and Goliards gradually lost its free and varied originality, becoming entangled in abstract formulas, reflecting religious asceticism.

Dante is the first medieval Christian poet to give his mistress a particular name and a form that distinguishes her from the others; he writes as love dictates within him. In the pages of the Vita Nuova, he colors images, thoughts, and feelings so that he often becomes a graceful and highly original artist.

Elementary studies in Dante's time: Trivium and Quadrivium

Elementary studies, at the time of Dante, were called the Trivium and the Quadrivium.

The Trivium included: Grammar, Rhetoric and Dialectic (Aristotle).

The Quadrivium: Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy.

The Trivium and Quadrivium did not include physical sciences, metaphysics, morals, civil and canon law, and sacred sciences, which formed separate categories.

Dante was educated in these studies and it is worth remembering that he was extremely learned in astronomy, so much so that some claimed his knowledge surpassed all that of his age.

Astronomy in the fourteenth century

Astronomy was the Ptolemaic one, which placed the Earth as the immobile center of the universe, around which revolve the seven planets: the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn; then the heaven of the fixed stars, the Primum Mobile, which gives motion to all the spheres below, and the fixed Empyrean, which gives motion to the Primum Mobile.

Each of the seven planets had a corresponding study, and precisely in this order:

Moon	Grammar	
Mercury	Rhetoric	Trivium
Venus	Dialectic	
Sun	Arithmetic	
Mars	Geometry	Crossroads
Jupiter	Music	
Saturn	Astronomy	

And to the heaven of the fixed stars, to the primum mobile (crystalline heaven) and to the Empyrean the sciences responded in the following order:

Sky of fixed stars

- Physics and
- Metaphysics

Crystalline sky (1st mobile)

- Moral

Empyrean

- Theology

Studies or University

In addition to these seven elementary studies there were other sciences, which were taught in the Studi, now the University.

Of the universities, the first was Bologna, mater studiorum; and it seems that Dante continued in Bologna, and later in Padua, to study the two main branches of philosophy of the time, namely logic or the science of ideas, and physics or the science of natural things. Dante loved philosophy because he called it a daughter of God.

Each Studiorum had a particular specialization: in Sicily, the formation of the vernacular; in Florence, artistic culture; in Umbria, ascetic culture; in Bologna, scientific culture.

Gemma Donati[7]

In his Vita Nuova, Dante narrates that a gentlewoman's face showed such pity for him that, seeing him grieve over Beatrice's death, she was moved. Dante sent her two sonnets, and, finding that woman similar to Beatrice, he began to be captivated by her.

It is not known for certain who this woman was; but it is likely Gemma, who lived in the small square of Rena, almost opposite the Alighieri house.

[7] Gemma Donati (Florence, 1267 – 1333/1342) was the wife of Dante Alighieri I. Information about Dante's wife is limited to her family of origin, the noble Donati house: Gemma, in fact, was the daughter of Ser Manetto and cousin of Corso, Forese and Piccarda Donati, and of Maria, who died in 1315. She was soon bound by an "instrumentum dotis" dated 9 February 1277, found in a deed drawn up in Florence in 1329 where Gemma requested the return of her deceased husband's real estate, including the dowry paid by her father years earlier to Dante, son of Alighiero degli Alighieri, from the notary Ser Oberto Baldovini.

Dante's Wedding

Gemma was the daughter of Manetto de' Donati, a Guelph, a powerful man with wealth and fiefdoms. Dante married her at the age of 27, in 1292. The union produced four children: Giovanni, the eldest, then Jacopo, Pietro, and Antonia. Pietro was a judge in Verona and the only one to continue the Alighieri lineage, as Jacopo chose to pursue an ecclesiastical career, while Antonia became a nun, taking the name of Sister Beatrice, apparently in the Olivetan convent in Ravenna. Giovanni, whose existence has always been doubted, is attested by a document from a Florentine notary dated May 20, 1314. Its discovery, unpublished, was made in 1940 by Renato Piattoli and rediscovered in 2016 with the publication of the new edition of the Dante Diplomatic Corps.

The mutual affection between Dante and Gemma apparently did not last long.

Gemma's being a member of the Donati family did not change Dante's political opinions.

Origin of Guelphs and Ghibellines in Florence

Ghibellinism in Italy is originally a foreign thing. It arose in Germany from the dispute over the throne between the Ghibelline Conrad III of Hohenstauffen and the Guelph Henry of Bavaria.

The divisions into Guelphs and Ghibellines occurred in 1215 due to the involvement of Buondelmonte dei Buondelmonti [8].

Buondelmonte had promised marriage to a good and modest girl of the Amidei family. But one day, as he passed by the Donati house, he saw on a balcony two lovely daughters of Madonna Aidruda, wife of Forteguerra Donati.

He fell in love with her. Madonna Aidruda, knowing that he came from a noble, rich, and powerful family, called him and offered him the more beautiful of her two daughters as a wife.

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[8] Buondelmonte de' Buondelmonti is a historical Florentine figure from the early 13th century, belonging to the Buondelmonti family. He was apparently engaged to a woman from the Amidei family; when Buondelmonte broke off the engagement because he had meanwhile fallen in love with a woman from the Donati family, the failed marriage was seen as a terrible insult by the Amidei family, who vowed revenge. The Amidei family held a council on what to do, and despite much hesitation, the hardest course was chosen: avenging the insult by murdering Buondelmonte (Mosca dei Lamberti famously uttered the proverbial expression " *Whatever is done is done* ," meaning that, no matter how drastic, a resolution was always better than a stalemate of indecision).

Buondelmonte thanked her for the offer, declaring, shrewdly, that he would have gladly taken the girl as a wife, if he had not been promised to Amidei.

Madonna Aidruda then frankly told him that she would take full responsibility for whatever might happen next.

Buondelmonte, looking at the beautiful girl, could not or did not want to find the strength to give up.

The news spread quickly, so the Amidei, joined with the Uberti, swore to avenge the insult by killing the perjured Buondelmonte on the very day of the wedding. And so it happened.

On the day Buondelmonte was going to church in the company of his young bride, all adorned in her wedding robes, accompanied by relatives and friends, his passage on the Ponte Vecchio was blocked by the Uberti and the Amidei, led by Mosca Lamberti, and after hurling the most rude insults, an altercation broke out.

There are armed men on both sides, and a fierce fight ensues, resulting in the groom being seriously injured.

After this tragic event, the divisions among the citizens deepened, secret hatreds emerged, and the streets of Florence were frequently littered with human corpses. The city split into two factions: the Guelphs and the Ghibellines.

The Ghibelline faction was more properly of an aristocratic and feudal nature and supported the empire; the Guelph faction, of a

popular, democratic and Slavic nature, supported the pope. With the wars fought against Pisa (1222) and later against Siena, the heated dissensions subsided, but only for a short time.

Frederick II (1194 - 1250), greedy for dominion, knowing that in Florence the Guelph party led by Pope Gregory IX was of smaller forces than the Ghibelline party favourable to the empire, thought that, if he offered help to his faction through the Uberti, he would easily succeed in driving out his adversaries; and thus, he would have that city entirely devoted to him.

The Prince of Antioch[9]

In 1248, Frederick II, occupied with the siege of Parma, sent his illegitimate son Frederick, Prince of Antioch, to Florence. He joined forces with the Ghibelline forces, with 1,600 German cavalry, and drove all the Guelphs from the city, dismantling its fortifications, menageries and towers to prevent them from returning to the hands of the defeated faction.

In the country the Adige and Po rivers line
Value and courtesy were often found
Before Federigo had any trouble:
Or it can certainly be passed on
For anyone who left, out of shame
To reason with good people, or to approach
(Purgatory XVI)

[9] Frederick of Antioch, the natural son of Emperor Frederick II, was Count of Alba (from around 1240), of Celano and Loreto (from 1252), Imperial Vicar General in Tuscany from 1245 to 1250, and Podestà of Florence. He fought for many years alongside his brother Manfred, defending Ghibelline ideals and interests in Italy. He was born from a relationship between Emperor Frederick II and a woman, whom tradition has identified as a Muslim originally from Antioch, which is why the Hohenstaufen scion was identified by that name. Others believe he was born to a woman named Maria or Matilde, of the noble Sicilian family "d'Antiochia."

Conrad IV and Manfred

But the Ghibellines resorted to abuses and acts of cruelty, while the expelled Guelphs led the revolt in Romagna and Lombardy. In Florence, the people rose up, and on October 20, 1250, they deposed the podestà and elected a captain.

On December 13th (1250), Frederick II died (in Ferentino, Puglia) and the people, having become more courageous, recalled the Guelph refugees to their homeland (January 7th 1251): the two factions made peace: the Guelphs returned to Pistoia, from which they had previously been expelled, in order to resist Conrad IV [10], Frederick II's successor. Conrad occupied Naples in 1253; after partially defeating the Guelphs, he died on May 21st 1254.

Manfred [11](crowned king in Palermo, August 11, 1258), remaining king of Apulia and Sicily, won Pisa and Siena over to his

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[10] Conrad IV of Hohenstaufen (Andria, 1228 – Lavello, 1254) was the son of Emperor Frederick II of Swabia and his second wife Yolanda of Brienne, Queen of Jerusalem, the only male child born from this marriage.

[11] Manfred of Hohenstaufen, or Manfred of Swabia or Manfred of Sicily (1232 – Benevento, February 26, 1266), was the last Hohenstaufen ruler of the Kingdom of Sicily. The natural son, later legitimized, of Emperor Frederick II of Swabia and Bianca Lancia, he was regent for his nephew Conradin from 1254, then King of Sicily from 1258. He died during the Battle of Benevento, defeated by the troops of Charles I of Anjou.

side; this was not the case for Florence, where the Uberti, proud and resolute Ghibellines, wanting to take control of the government of the republic, were put to flight by the people.

Battle of Montaperti

The expelled Ghibellines and Farinata joined Manfredi and won the memorable Battle of Montaperti (a hill east of Siena) against the Guelphs, resulting in a Ghibelline victory. Among the exiled Guelphs was Brunetto Latini.

Charles of Anjou and the Battle of Benevento

Urban IV [12]of France, created pope in 1261, in 1263 encouraged Charles of Anjou [13], Count of Provence, brother of Louis IX, to

[12] Urban IV, born Jacques Pantaléon (c. 1195 – Deruta, 1264), was the 182nd Pope of the Catholic Church, reigning from 1261 until his death. Urban IV never established his papal seat in Rome, but resided between Viterbo and Orvieto, as well as spending a brief period in Perugia before his death.

[13] Charles I of Anjou (Paris, 1226 – Foggia, 1285), son of the king of France, Louis VIII the Lion, and Blanche of Castile, was king of Sicily from 1266 until his expulsion from the island in 1282 following the Sicilian Vespers.

come to Italy to have the lordship of Benevento, (the Church would have had a census of 8000 ounces of gold).

Charles accepted the Pope's offers: in the same year that Urban IV died, 1265, he sailed to Rome with an army of 30,000 men. He arrived on May 24th and was welcomed by the new Pope, Clement IV. He received the crown of Sicily and the banner of the Church. The following year, 1266, he entered the kingdom of Naples and prepared for battle against Manfred.

The battle took place on February 6 near Benevento and Manfred, wounded by two wounds, one to the head and one to the chest, lost his life.

Corradino and the Battle of Tagliacozzo

In 1268, Corradino di Svevia [14], nephew of Manfredi, urged by the Italians, despite the excommunication of the Pope, comes to Italy and in Tagliacozzo has a clash with the d'Angiò, captured and beheaded, in the company of his cousin the Duke of Austria, in the Piazza del Carmine in Naples.

Charles's victories over Manfred and Conradin led to the prevalence of Guelphism. Florence accepted French rule for ten years.

[14] Conrad of Sicily, also known as Corradino (1252–1268), was Duke of Swabia and the last of the reigning Hohenstaufen. After the death of his uncle Manfred, killed in the Battle of Benevento on February 26, 1266, the Italian Ghibellines called for his descent into the peninsula, and in September 1267, Corradino moved to reconquer his kingdom, which had meanwhile passed to the French crown of Charles I of Anjou. Corradino then headed south and, reaching the gates of his kingdom, came into contact with the forces of Charles of Anjou. Here, the tragic and fatal battle that Dante Alighieri later made known as the Battle of Tagliacozzo took place on August 23, 1268. Corradino, defeated, was betrayed by Giovanni Frangipane and handed over to Charles of Anjou, who had him imprisoned in Naples' Castel dell'Ovo. Tried and sentenced to death, he was beheaded in Campo Moricino (the current Market Square in Naples) on 29 October 1268.

Cardinal Frangipane - Gregory X

Except for Pisa, Siena, and Poggibonzi, all the Tuscan cities, freely or by force, became Guelph. Gregory X [15](Pope 1271-1276), passing through Florence in July 1273, proposed a peace between the Guelphs and Ghibellines; but they were offended by the proposal and threatened the Ghibelline legates with death.

Gregory X's noble attempt was repeated - but in vain - by Innocent V: in the end Nicholas III degli Orsini (Pope 1277-1281), successor of John XXI, sent Cardinal Latino Malabranca, known as Frangipani [16], who, in 1279, reconciled the two factions and the main families, and on January 18, 1280, celebrated their peace in the

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[15] Gregory X, born Tedaldo Visconti (or Teobaldo) (Piacenza, 1210 – 1276), was the 184th Pope of the Catholic Church. The election of Gregory X took place after a full 1,006 days of vacancy in the see, at the end of an interminable and extremely complicated papal election that made it the first and longest conclave in history. Pope Gregory X, mindful of what happened in Viterbo, promulgated his own apostolic constitution, containing precise norms regulating papal elections: it was the *Ubi Periculum* . The constitution stipulated that, within ten days of the Pope's death, the cardinal electors were to gather, each with a single companion, in a room in the palace where the deceased pontiff resided and were to be segregated there without any contact with the outside world. If three days had passed without an election, the cardinals' food was to be reduced to a single dish per meal. After another five days, food was to be further limited to bread, wine, and water; furthermore, during the election, all ecclesiastical income of the cardinals was withheld by the Camerlengo, who would then make it available to the new pope.

square of Santa Maria Novella. And under a captain of the people, eight Guelphs and six Ghibellines were placed in government of the Republic.

In 1282, the people wanted the government of the Republic to reside in 6 citizens (one for each Sestiere), called Priors of the Arts.

The ambition for power is more powerful than accumulated wealth. Money is not enough: they want command. The Florentine nobles, to participate in the government of the Republic, abandon their titles, their coats of arms, their franchises: they become popular, or, more precisely, artisans. And the poor commoners take advantage of this opportunity to create new nobilities: this leads to perpetual confusion.

[16] Latino Malabranca Orsini (Rome, 1235 – Perugia, 1294) was an Italian cardinal. In 1280, he was sent to Florence to attempt a peace between the Guelphs and Ghibellines. A settlement was achieved, but it was somewhat fictitious, as the conflict flared up again shortly thereafter.

The Judiciary of Florence

The supreme magistracy of the government of Florence resided, after the death of Countess Matilda [17], in the consuls; then in the elders; then for a short time, in the good men; and finally, in 1282, in the Priors called of the Arts, because they had to belong to the corporations of the same.

At the time of Dante there were 12 Arts; 7 major and 5 minor: later they reached 21, and were called major, median and minor.

The Gonfaloniere of Justice

In 1292, a magistrate was created called Gonfaloniere di Giustizia, who initially had command of 1000, and then of 2000 men (paid by the corporations), with whom he protected the people against the nobles, and enforced the laws of justice against them;

[17] Matilda of Canossa (1046–1115) was an Italian noblewoman of Lombard descent, a member of the Attoni dynasty, commonly known as "Canossa" after the name of one of their fiefdoms. Matilda was a powerful feudal lord; she fervently defended the papacy during the Investiture Controversy. She emerged as a major figure, extending her dominion over all the Italian territories north of the Papal States.

very severe laws, which had been compiled mainly by Giano della Bella.

The executive and legislative power

In 1306, the executor was appointed to this office, and then the gonfaloniere formed part of the supreme magistracy of the Priors, which, over time, was called the Signoria.

All citizens who were members of the guilds and met the other requirements required by law could exercise political rights. The Priors and the Gonfaloniere of Justice were drawn from the consuls and heads of the guilds.

In general, executive power resided in the Signoria; the legislative branch was then divided into three Councils: the Council of the People, the Council of the Capitudini, and the Council of the Potestà, also known as the Special Council. The Priors and the Gonfaloniere were not drawn by lot from the purses, but were elected by themselves.

Every proposed law, before being presented to the Councils (today we would call them Assemblies or Chambers), had to be deliberated and won by the majority of the Priors and Colleges.

The Colleges and Offices of the Captain and the Authority

The Colleges were made up of 12 citizens pro tempore and 16 gonfalonieri of the people's companies, and were frequently consulted by the Signoria, especially in important affairs.

The proposal, won by a majority vote among the Priors and the Colleges, was brought to the People's Council. This was also called the Captain's Council, and the office of Captain had been created on October 20, 1250, to distinguish it from that of the Potestà, also called the Council of the Commune: the office of Potestà was created in 1207.

The People's Council was initially composed of 285 citizens, then 300 or more: they were not elected, but were chosen by lot from among the most notable Guelph commoners. The Council was composed entirely of commoners and was presided over by the captain. The proposal, once passed by the People's Council, was brought before the Council of Capitudini. This was so called because it was composed of the heads of the major and middle guilds, namely, consuls, gonfaloniers, captains, and other officials of these guilds.

The proposal was then brought forward by the Council of the Podestà, which consisted of 90 or 100 members, some of whom were more distinguished commoners, and some of whom were nobles: it was, so to speak, a Council of optimates, which today we would call the Upper House.

Once the proposal had been approved, it had to undergo a final test; and this was in the General Council, where all three Councils, that of the people, of the leaders and of the Authority, met.

Then the proposal acquired the force of law; and its execution was entrusted now to the Podestà, now to the Captain of the People, and now to the Executor of Justice, according to its particular nature.

Conditions for being registered in the Councils or in the judiciary

To be a member of one of these councils and exercise political rights, one had to be a member of one of the guilds; pay taxes, duties, and forced loans; and be a Guelph citizen no less than 30 years of age.

Dante belonged to some of these Councils in 1295, 1296, 1300 and 1301; and since, from some fragments of a paper code, which

are still preserved in the central archive of Florence, it is known that he was a member of the council of the Capitudini several times, it is possible to deduce that he was not a simple member, but one of the leaders.

Sicilian Vespers

The misgovernment of Charles of Anjou; the arrogance of his officials; the heavy taxes imposed on the people, the violence of Charles's vicar, Heribert of Orleans, incited Palermo to revolt.

According to popular legend, and it remains so, the revolt was sparked by a soldier's insult to a young girl, who searched her breasts to see if she was hiding weapons. The uprising spread throughout Sicily, and the French were massacred: Manfred's son-in-law, Peter of Aragon, became its ruler, and divided Sicily from the Kingdom of Naples.

Dante was then seventeen years old.

In Canto VIII of Paradiso (73 - 75) he recalls the revolt of Palermo in the words he puts into the mouth of Charles Martel, firstborn of Charles II of Anjou, when he says that Sicily would have waited, even after his death, for the kings descending from him,

If bad lordship, which always saddens
The subject peoples, had not
Palermo was moved to shout: mora, mora .

And, in the same year (1282), the French sent by Martin IV (Simon of Brion, of Champagne) were defeated, around Forlì, by the brave and astute Count Guido di Montefeltro:

The earth, which has already undergone the long test,
And a bloody pile of Frenchmen.
(Inferno XXVII)

Pisa and Genoa – Count Ugolino

The victorious Guelph party eagerly expands its dominion. Venice dominates the Dalmatian coast; Genoa dominates the Riviera; and Pisa dominates the seas. But Pisa wages war against Genoa for the possession of Corsica, which it took from the Saracens in 1099.

In 1282 (Pisa) it was defeated: in 1284, having prepared a new fleet, it resumed the battle at Meloria, on August 6th: it was defeated a second time due to the pusillanimity of Ugolino, Count of

Gherardesca [18]and of Donoratico, called by Fazio degli Uberti "a great and noble citizen".

The Pisans suffered 5,000 deaths and 11,000 prisoners. Then the Tuscan Guelphs moved against Pisa, which elected Ugolino as dictator. To make himself absolute ruler, Ugolino bought peace: he sent the Pisan Guelphs to Florence and had himself proclaimed Captain General.

The people rise up (1289): Ugolino, in the company of the Upezzinghi and the Gaetani, heroically defends the square and the surroundings of S. Sebastiano and S. Sepolcro, then shuts himself in the people's palace together with his sons and grandsons.

The revolt lasts until the evening; and Ugolino, taken prisoner, is locked up in the tower of the seven streets, with his two sons (Uguccione and Gaddo) and three grandchildren (Anselmuccio, Ugolino and Brigata), and left to die of hunger (March 12).

Pisa loses the island of Elba and Corsica, fighting against the Guelph cities of Florence, Pistoia, Lucca and Siena: later it makes peace: from then on it begins to decline: it loses its independence, first under Uguccione della Faggiuola (b. 1250), and then under Louis the Bavarian.

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[18] Ugolino della Gherardesca (Pisa, 1210–1289) was an Italian Ghibelline politician and soldier. His figure was depicted, twenty years later, at the beginning of Canto XXXIII of the Inferno of Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy.

Black Whites

In Pistoia, new disagreements arise between two branches of the Cancellieri family (1286). Focaccia de' Cancellieri, a nobleman, cuts off the hand of his young cousin (Dorè) for a minor offense. He then runs to the house of the amputee, who was his paternal uncle, and kills him. Then, one of the parties, from Bianca Cancellieri, calls itself Bianca; the other, by opposition, Nera.

Each party seeks to be supported; and so the Blacks join forces with the Guelphs and Pope Boniface VIII (successor to Celestine elected in 1294); the Whites with the Ghibellines.

The Battle of Campaldino and the Siege of Caprona

In 1289, the Florentines waged war on Arezzo, because the city had turned Ghibelline in 1287, under the influence of Bishop Guglielmino degli Ubertini dei Pazzi. He elected Buonconte di Montefeltro, son of the Podestà of Pisa (Guido), as captain.

The battle took place at Campaldino, near Poppi (in the Casentino area), on Saturday 11 June 1289, in the district called Certomondo. The Florentines were victorious.

Dante also found himself at this battle; and Leonardo Bruni states that in one of his letters, speaking of the priory, he says: *"Ten years had already passed after the battle of Campaldino, in which the Ghibelline faction was almost completely dead and defeated, where I found myself in arms as a child, and where at the beginning I felt great fear, and at the end very great joy for the various events of that battle."*

In Purgatory (V, 88-129), Buonconte narrates to Dante the details of his death.

Happy with the victory, the Florentines, having joined forces with the Lucchese, in September of the same year (1289), moved against Pisa; but they only won the castle of Caprona.

Dante also took part in this event: he recalls it, through simile, in the Inferno, when, fearing the devils who appeared before him, he says:

And so I once saw the infantry fear,
Who came out of Caprona under a treaty,
Seeing himself among so many enemies
(XXI, 95-97).

It is worth remembering that, in May of that year, the Poet met Charles Martel (son of Charles II the Lame) in Florence, who greatly loved him.

Dante Prior

Dante was a member of the guild of physicians and apothecaries (one of the major guilds), a very important profession at the time, dealing not only with medicines but also with the trade of spices and products, which came from all over the East. At that time, Dante was 35 years old. He was midway through life's journey.

He was elected Prior on June 15, 1300, and the Priorate lasted two months; and Dante remained in his office until August 15.

Worthy of mention during his Priory are the reception of the legate Cardinal Fra Matteo d' Acquasparta, and the condemnation to exile of the leaders of the black and white factions, among whom, on the black side, Corso Donati; and, on the white side, Guido Cavalcanti, son-in-law of Farinata.

Dante was accused of being partial to Bianca, because she (and Guido Cavalcanti, Dante's friend) were recalled to Florence before the other, even though we doubted her partiality.

Jubilee

The fourteenth century opens with the Jubilee (February 22) under Boniface VIII.

The Christians of that time used to come to Rome at the beginning of every century in the hope of obtaining, for that pilgrimage, many indulgences, and, therefore, the forgiveness of all their sins.

In 1300, the "concourse" was truly enormous. Boniface wanted to sanctify it: he granted pardon to all, declared publicly that a plenary indulgence would be granted to those who visited Rome every 100 years, and called the feast a Jubilee.

It is believed that Dante participated in it as can be understood in Canto XVIII of the Inferno, where he speaks of many scattered devils.

Here, there up the dark rock, :
Like the Romans, for the army very much,
The Jubilee year, up the bridge
They have a way of passing people;
That on one side everyone has a forehead
Towards the Castle, and they go to Santo Pietro,
From the other bank they go towards the mountain.

On the occasion of the Jubilee, Dante concretized the idea of writing the Comedy, perhaps because, during the Jubilee, he felt a greater desire to leave the forest of vice and return to the contemplative life, also mindful of what he had written of Beatrice, at the end of the Vita Nuova, that is, he would have said of her " *what had never been said of any other woman";* or because, after the time of his priorship, his enemies had triumphed over him with false accusations under the guise of truth and therefore he felt bored and disgusted with everything of this world.

Janus of the Beautiful

The division between the Donati and Cerchi factions was extremely damaging to Florence, and the nobles, oppressing the people, fomented revolt. This is why Giano della Bella [19], a nobleman, out of resentment at Berto Frescobaldi, joined the ranks of the people and created the Supreme Gonfaloniere of Justice, commander of 1,000 armed citizens, decreeing extremely severe

[19] Giano Della Bella was an important figure in the Republic of Florence in the second half of the thirteenth century. Dino Compagni wrote of him: *"The proud nobles and great citizens inflicted many injuries on the common people [...]. Therefore, many good citizens, commoners and merchants, among whom was a great and powerful citizen (a wise, valiant, and good man, named Giano della Bella, very courageous and of good lineage, who resented these injuries) became their leader and guide"* (Cronica, Book I, XI).

laws against the Magnates. He was a man of great courage and did everything in favor of justice against the guilty.

Therefore, the notables decided to lose him and agreed to want him dead. However, Giano was not killed, but banished on March 5, 1264, with his property confiscated and his house burned.

Brother Matthew of Acquasparta

After his expulsion, the discord intensified, and the Guelphs then appealed to Boniface VIII, who sent Fra Matteo d'Acquasparta [20]as his legate, but he failed to achieve peace between the factions. The Priors, therefore (including Dante), to avert the danger facing the Republic, decided to exile the leaders of the two factions.

The cardinal left shortly thereafter, but with the return of the last Whites, even more serious riots broke out. The Blacks turned

[20] Matteo Bentivegna (or Bentivenga) of the Lords of Acquasparta (1240 – 1302) was an Italian cardinal, theologian, and philosopher, a member of the Franciscan Order. After the sudden resignation of Celestine V, he became a key player in the Christmas Conclave of 1294, which led to the election of Benedetto Caetani, Pope Boniface VIII, of whom he was one of the very few trusted friends. In 1300, the pope sent him to Florence as apostolic legate, in an attempt to pacify the Guelph factions of the Cerchi and Donati, especially when news reached the pontiff that the Cerchi, who were more numerous, had allied themselves with Ghibelline cities such as Pisa and Arezzo.

once again to Boniface, who decided to send them Charles, Count of Valois and Alençon [21](son of King Philip III the Bold and brother of Philip IV the Fair, 1270–1325), who had already set out to conquer the kingdoms of Sicily, Aragon, and Barcelona, having been investitured by Pope Martin IV in 1284. Upon learning of this, the Priors sent four ambassadors to Boniface towards the end of September to persuade him to abandon his ill-fated plan: among them was Dante.

Charles of Valois: Dante's accusations and condemnation

Valois entered Florence in early November (1301), and was greatly honored by the citizens and remained there for 5 months, until April of the following year. The Neri, supported by Charles, began to attack their adversaries: the latter rose up in defense. Dante left Rome to return to Florence, and upon arriving in Siena he learned that his enemies had accused him:

- of having become a Ghibelline and therefore of siding with Henry VII;

[21] Charles de Valois (1270 – 1325) also became Count of Anjou by marriage.

- of having sold, during his priorship, public offices;
- of having committed evil deeds and swindles;

and that the mayor had condemned him in absentia and confiscated all his assets.

Three months later, false accusations are renewed and Dante is sentenced to be burned alive.

In this regard Dante puts in the mouth of Cacciaguida (Par., XVII, 44-69):

How Hippolytus left Athens
For the ruthless and perfidious noverca,
You must leave Florence.
This is what is wanted, and this is what is already being sought,
And it will be done soon to anyone who thinks that.
There where Christ is traded all day.
The blame will follow the offended party
In a cry, as usual; but revenge
I will bear witness to the truth that dispenses it.
You will leave everything you love
More dearly, and this is that arrow
Let the bow of exile first shoot.
You will taste how salty it is
Other people's bread, and how hard the road is
Going up and down other people's stairs.
And what will weigh most on your shoulders
It will be the evil and foolish company
With which you will fall into this valley;
That all ungrateful, all mad and impious Will turn against you; but shortly after
She, not you, will have broken his temple.

His bestiality is the reason for his trial.
He'll try it, yes it will be nice for you
Having made you part of yourself.

Attempts to return to Florence by force were in vain, and so the Ghibellines and the Whites (and Dante) thought it best to retreat to Siena. But they remained there for a very short time, knowing from experience that that city was not stable in its political and civil principles, hence the motto " *The She-Wolf Whores"* .

From Siena, they went to Arezzo, then governed by the podestà Uguccione della Faggiuola. He treated the exiles unwelcomingly, and forced to leave Arezzo, almost all of them sought refuge with Scarpetta degli Ordelaffi, vicar of the Church in Forlì.

Ordelaffi's Slipper[22]

Ordelaffi asked for the help of Bartolomeo della Scala in Verona to ask for help, as can be deduced from Dante's words in Canto XVII of Paradise.

Your first refuge and your first hostel
It will be the courtesy of the great Lombard
Which carries the holy bird on the ladder.
Who will have such benign regard for you,
That, of doing and asking, between you two,
That which is the latest among the others shall be the first, etc.

[22] Scarpetta degli Ordelaffi (... – 1315) lord of Forlì from 1295 until his death, belonging to the Ordelaffi dynasty.

Meanwhile, the fierce battles between the Whites and the Blacks in Pistoia continued. In May 1301, the Whites of Pistoia joined forces with the Whites of Florence and drove all the Blacks from the city. The Blacks, in turn, joined forces with the Blacks of Florence; and they were so numerous that they prevailed over the Whites and took control of the government of the Republic.

Mindful of their expulsion, wanting to take revenge on the Bianchi, they allied themselves with the republicans of Lucca, electing as their captain the Marquis Moroello Malaspina of Val di Magra (in Lunigiana). First, they laid siege to Serravalle and dismantled its castles. Then, in 1302, they fought a terrible battle on the Campo Piceno, between Serravalle and Montecatini; and the Bianchi suffered such a defeat that they were forced to surrender Serravalle first, and then all of Pistoia.

Death of Boniface VIII, and election of Benedict XI

On October 11, 1303, Pope Boniface died as a result of Philip the Fair's violence, and in the same month, Benedict XI (Nicola Boccasini) was elected. He sent his legate, Nicolò Albertini da Prato, Cardinal of Ostia (March 10, 1304), to Florence to persuade the Florentines to make peace.

The exiled Aretines promised him not to take up arms: the Neri advised him to go to Pistoia to reconcile the opposing factions. In his absence in Florence, the Neri maliciously insinuated that he

wanted to ally himself with the Ghibellines and change the government of the Republic.

When Cardinal Albertini returned to Florence he was greeted with suspicion and his words were not heeded.

The Ghibellines attempt in vain to return to Florence

The Ghibellines of Arezzo, Romagna, and Bologna assembled an army of 9,000 infantry and approximately 1,600 cavalry, and, accompanied by all the exiles, marched against Florence but were repelled by the city's Guelphs. On the same day, July 22, 1304, Benedict XI died in Perugia.

Clement V, Florence and Pistoia

After a year of interregnum, in 1305, the archbishop of Bordeaux, Bertrand, who called himself Clement V [23], was elected

[23] Clement V, born Bertrand de Got, de Goth or de Gouth (1264 – 1314), was the 195th pope, from 1305 until his death. He is remembered for having suppressed the order of the Templars (1307) and for having transferred the Holy See to France. Clement's pontificate was a disastrous period for Italy. The papal provinces were entrusted to a group of three cardinals, but Rome, the battlefield of the Colonna and Orsini families, remained ungovernable.

pope. He was the first to establish the papal seat in Avignon, where he remained until 1377.

This pope, like his predecessors, hastened to send Cardinal Napoleone degli Orsini (nephew of Pope Nicholas III) to Florence as a peacemaker.

At that time, Florence, led by the Duke of Calabria, Robert, son of Charles II of Anjou, had besieged Pistoia, which had to surrender in April 1306. The cardinal, having been unable to obtain anything from the Florentines, indignantly left Tuscany with thoughts of vengeance.

Days before the siege of Pistoia, the Ghibellines had been driven out of Bologna; and Cardinal Napoleone degli Orsini, the peacemaker sent by the Pope, had gone and had the Studio (the university) closed.

Dante had also gone to Bologna, and having joined the other Ghibelline exiles - since after the unjust sentences he had become a spirited Ghibelline - he went to the Mugello in the Sieve Valley.

Dante in Padua and with the Malaspina family: Corso Donati

Dante then went to Padua and stayed there for a few months, where he fell in love with a noble Scrovegni Stone, and remembers her family in Inferno Canto XVII, 64-65.

It is not known how long he lived in the Malaspina house, but having learned of the bitter struggles between the Florentine factions, he went to Paris.

Dante in Paris

In Paris, he devoted himself wholeheartedly to the study of philosophy, morality, and theology. As Boccaccio reports, he apparently visited England and the University of Oxford. In 1310, Dante returned to Italy.

Clement V and Henry VII

Napoleon Orsini, forced to leave Florence, had vowed revenge. Returning to France, he persuaded Clement V to summon Henry VII of the House of Lutzelburg to Italy to maintain papal authority there as well. For this purpose, he could not have resorted to Philip the Fair, who had always been a bitter enemy of the Church.

Henry VII, elected emperor in 1308, crowned king of Germany and recognized as such by the Pope, was the nephew of Rudolf of Habsburg and son of Albert. Dante, addressing Albert:

Oh German Albert, who abandons
She, who is made untamed and wild,

And you should ride on his saddles,
Fair judgment falls from the stars
Upon your blood, and let it be new and open,
So that your successor will be afraid of it.

Dante, who saw Italy as untamed and wild, then placed all his hopes of returning home and of peace in the new emperor and wrote a long letter to the princes and people of Italy, exhorting them to rejoice in Henry and to welcome him favorably. After a few victories, Henry fell ill and died. Pisa gave itself over to Uguccione della Faggiuola, who defeated the Florentines at Montecatini in 1315 and took Lucca by treachery. Governing despotically, he was expelled (1316) and went into exile at Can Grande della Scala.

Dante at Cane della Scala, and in Lucca

Following Henry's death and Uguccione's expulsion, Dante abandoned all hope of returning to his homeland, and, perhaps invited by Uguccione, went to the Scaliger at the beginning of 1317.

Humiliating conditions for returning to Florence

In 1317, when Guido da Battifolle was elected mayor of Florence, all exiles were granted permission to return home on the

condition that they pay a tax and go in procession, holding a candle, to the Church of San Giovanni, to ask the Saint's forgiveness for their mistakes. Dante does not accept the conditions: " *And what, then? Shall I not be able to gaze everywhere at the light of the sun and the stars? Shall I not be able to contemplate the sweetest truths under every corner of the sky, unless I first render myself "inglorious," indeed ignominious, to the people and the city of Florence? Nor, certainly, will bread be lacking."*

Dante in Verona and Ravenna

In early 1317, Dante went to Verona to the court of the Scaligeri. He remained there for three years. On January 20, 1320, in the Church of Saint Helena, he publicly supported, before the clergy of Verona, the thesis regarding the sphericity of the earth.

At the beginning of 1320, at the repeated invitations of Guido V Novello da Polenta (Francesca's nephew), he went to Ravenna, and received such comfort and loving care that he found that stay dear and pleasant, where he finished the third canticle, and dedicated it, with an epistle, to Cane della Scala (1291-1329).

His death

And when Venice waged war on Guido, he sent Dante as an ambassador to the Republic to try to bring it to peace. But the

embassy was fruitless. He contracted a fever on the return journey by land and became so gravely ill that, on September 14, 1321, he died at the age of 56.

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